

VZCZCXRO0250
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAH #0204/01 0471400
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 161400Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8415
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNOSC/OSCE POST COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0179
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0201
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1870
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0613
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0667
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/HSE/CCJ5// PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2// PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ASHGABAT 000204

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA
NSC FOR DEHART

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#) [US](#)
SUBJECT: MFA MEREDOV TELLS BOUCHER TURKMENISTAN EAGER FOR
NEXT STEPS IN COOPERATION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Jennifer Brush for reasons 1.4 (B)
) and (D).

Summary

11. (C) Foreign Minister Rashit Meredov accepted Assistant
Secretary Boucher's proposal to send U.S. experts in five

SIPDIS
areas -- education and health; economic reform, business
development and agriculture; energy; political development
and human rights; security -- to Turkmenistan over the coming
weeks as a next step. Boucher stressed that the United
States must see signs that change was ongoing in
Turkmenistan, including on Red Cross visits, travel and
access to information. The two men touched briefly on
regional cooperation and electricity for Afghanistan. End
Summary.

Meredov Has a Busy Day

12. (C) Boucher met with Meredov on February 15 in a
70-minute meeting. (Note: Meredov attended all of President
Berdimuhamedov's many bilateral meetings and had many
one-on-one meetings with visiting dignitaries as well on
February 15. End Note.) Notwithstanding his hectic pace,
Meredov, listening carefully to ensure the embassy's
translator was on-message, seemed focused and relaxed,
occasionally even joking with Boucher and other delegation
members. He welcomed the progression of U.S. visitors to
Ashgabat since President Niyazov's death and stressed the
"good opportunities" that the visits had presented for the
bilateral relationship and the concerns of both countries.
The meetings had covered a broad range of significant issues;
each issue -- security, and humanitarian and economic affairs
-- was of top significance, and Turkmenistan would seriously
study all U.S. proposals.

Boucher: Need to Resolve Issues Affecting Cooperation

13. (C) Noting that the assistance delegation led by Assistance Coordinator Tom Adams was the largest inter-agency group ever to visit Turkmenistan, Boucher stated that the delegation demonstrated the U.S. interest in cooperation with Turkmenistan. The United States was ready to move forward on expanding existing areas of cooperation and implementing new ones in education, economic reform (including private business), elections, constitutional reform, and development of media and a more active political society. The United States was not looking to Turkmenistan to change everything overnight, but rather, needed to see signs that change was ongoing and that there was a potential for development. Systematic, step-by-step change was essential. In that respect, there were two issues that affected how the United States could do its work in Turkmenistan:

-- Visas. There had been many problems with getting visas for U.S. experts to enter Turkmenistan. A USAID employee had been denied a visa, as had experts on law, accounting, and embassy security. Hopefully, Turkmenistan could find a smoother system for visa issuance that would avoid further complications for cooperative programs.

-- Lack of direct contacts. Turkmenistan was one of the few countries in the world where the embassy still had to work through diplomatic notes and to arrange all contacts through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the United States recognized the importance of coordinating policy, embassy personnel needed to be able to have direct contacts with their counterparts if the United States was to have an active, normal bilateral relationship.

Turkmenistan's Priorities: Education...

ASHGABAT 00000204 002 OF 004

14. (C) Meredov said that, as had been born out in Boucher's meeting with Berdimuhammedov, Turkmenistan wanted cooperation in education. Noting the breadth of U.S. exchanges and training programs that already existed in Turkmenistan, Meredov emphasized that education was a "necessary direction for further interaction and cooperation." If any problems came up, then the embassy and "we" would resolve them. He emphasized that his use of "we" meant that he could speak for the president.

...Economic Reform...

15. (C) Meredov also welcomed continuing cooperation on economic reform and development of entrepreneurship. There already were good USAID programs for Turkmenistan accountants and economists, including through the Union of Economists. He seemed surprised when the Charge noted that this was, nonetheless, one of the areas that was being disrupted by visa refusals. After USAID Regional Director Christopher Crowley added that USAID had also run into problems with the Ministry of Education refusing to recognize diplomas from the accountants program, Meredov quickly changed pace, proposing that USAID should send a delegation to Turkmenistan to meet with the Ministries of Education and Economy and Finance to work on merging course requirements with Turkmenistan's accreditation requirements. Crowley offered to give the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a list of USAID programs already existing in the region that could quickly be introduced to Turkmenistan, including in agriculture.

...and Elections...

16. (C) Meredov noted that Boucher had already discussed cooperation on elections with Berdimuhammedov and already knew the president wanted to improve the work of the Central Election Commission. Boucher reiterated U.S. eagerness to be

involved, and expressed as well U.S. satisfaction that Turkmenistan had involved the OSCE in developing its electoral process in the future.

Meredov: "We" Will Resolve Any Impediments

17. (C) Meredov promised that "we" would assist with any problems with visas, since Turkmenistan had already agreed to the programs. When the Charge noted that the embassy frequently found itself caught in the middle between the State Service for Registration of Foreign Citizens, which was responsible for issuing visas, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Meredov said he understood and would try to resolve the problem. He would discuss the problem further with the embassy and find a solution.

Boucher Proposes Next Steps

18. (C) As a next step, Boucher proposed to send experts in five areas -- education and health; economic reform, private business development and agriculture; energy; political development and human rights; and security -- to Turkmenistan in the coming weeks. Meredov agreed, joking that the embassy needed more of a workload.

Turkmenistan Wants to Participate in Regional Programs

19. (C) Boucher noted U.S. efforts to promote a regional approach to issues, including trade, combating narcotics trafficking, and security. He noted that the biggest problem the United States faced in promoting this approach was

ASHGABAT 00000204 003 OF 004

Uzbekistan, a "big country in the middle" that was blocking all efforts. When Boucher asked Meredov for advice, Meredov laughed. Turkmenistan, Meredov said, was open to regional cooperation and tried to participate in regional conferences, including counternarcotics meetings in Dushanbe and Vienna, and the electricity conference in Istanbul, though it might not always be active. Nonetheless, Turkmenistan wanted to continue participating in U.S.-sponsored regional events, as well as those sponsored by the OSCE, United Nations and European organizations, all of which were "useful."

Turkmenistan Eager to Provide Electricity to Afghanistan

110. (C) In response to a question from Boucher, Meredov denied that Turkmenistan was feeling the effects on its water supply of Tajikistan's decision to build dams, because Tajikistan had talked a great deal and signed Memoranda of Understanding, but had not yet begun building the dams. The problem, according to Meredov, was that nobody wanted to invest in building dams in Tajikistan because there was no profit. To be profitable, Tajikistan needed markets for its hydropower. Where could it sell its power, he asked, since neither Afghanistan and Pakistan had the money to pay. Boucher disagreed with Meredov's comment that Pakistan did not have the money, noting that there would be electric lines running from Tajikistan to Pakistan in two years. Tajikistan's real problem was that it had not created an environment favorable for investment and marketing. Rather than seeking to promote investment, it had sought to adhere to central planning. Boucher also noted that the Europeans, Japanese and United States all had programs; a U.S. goal was to promote better coordination. The United States hoped to work through the Central Asian Economic Coordination (CAREC) program of the Asian Development Bank to facilitate work on economic and trade issues. Meredov stressed that he was not wishing Tajikistan, a fraternal country, ill. Turkmenistan wanted its "brothers" to "have what God gave them."

111. (C) Meredov noted that President Niyazov had agreed to

supply energy to Afghanistan when asked by Afghanistan Minister of Energy Khan. Turkmenistan had gas, and it was easier to produce electricity from gas than by building dams.

Boucher said that there would be two electrical systems, one in northern Afghanistan, and the other in the south; they would have some energy generation potential. The United States hoped that Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan would supply the electricity to Afghanistan; the combination of gas and hydropower was a good one, so the United States was glad to hear of Turkmenistan's conversation with Afghanistan on the issue.

Meredov Willing to Discuss Anything

¶12. (C) Meredov asked whether there were any other issues, stating that he was willing to discuss anything. If he was unable to provide an answer immediately, it did not mean that Turkmenistan was unwilling to engage in discussion. Noting that he had earlier stressed the need for signs that Turkmenistan was moving forward, Boucher clarified that such signs could include allowing the Red Cross to visit prisons, opening access to information on the Internet, freeing up travel, and moving towards other improvements, such as more open elections this year and next year. The United States was willing to work with Turkmenistan in these areas. And, as the United States saw signs of change, there would be even more eagerness for further cooperation.

Comment

¶13. (C) Meredov was more confident than post has ever before seen him and clearly wanted to communicate that he had the

ASHGABAT 00000204 004 OF 004

president's support. While Meredov's assertions that Berdimuhammedov, too, wants change are encouraging, the United States needs to continue calibrating its response to the actual actions that the government takes. End Comment.

¶14. (U) A/S Boucher has cleared this message.
BRUSH